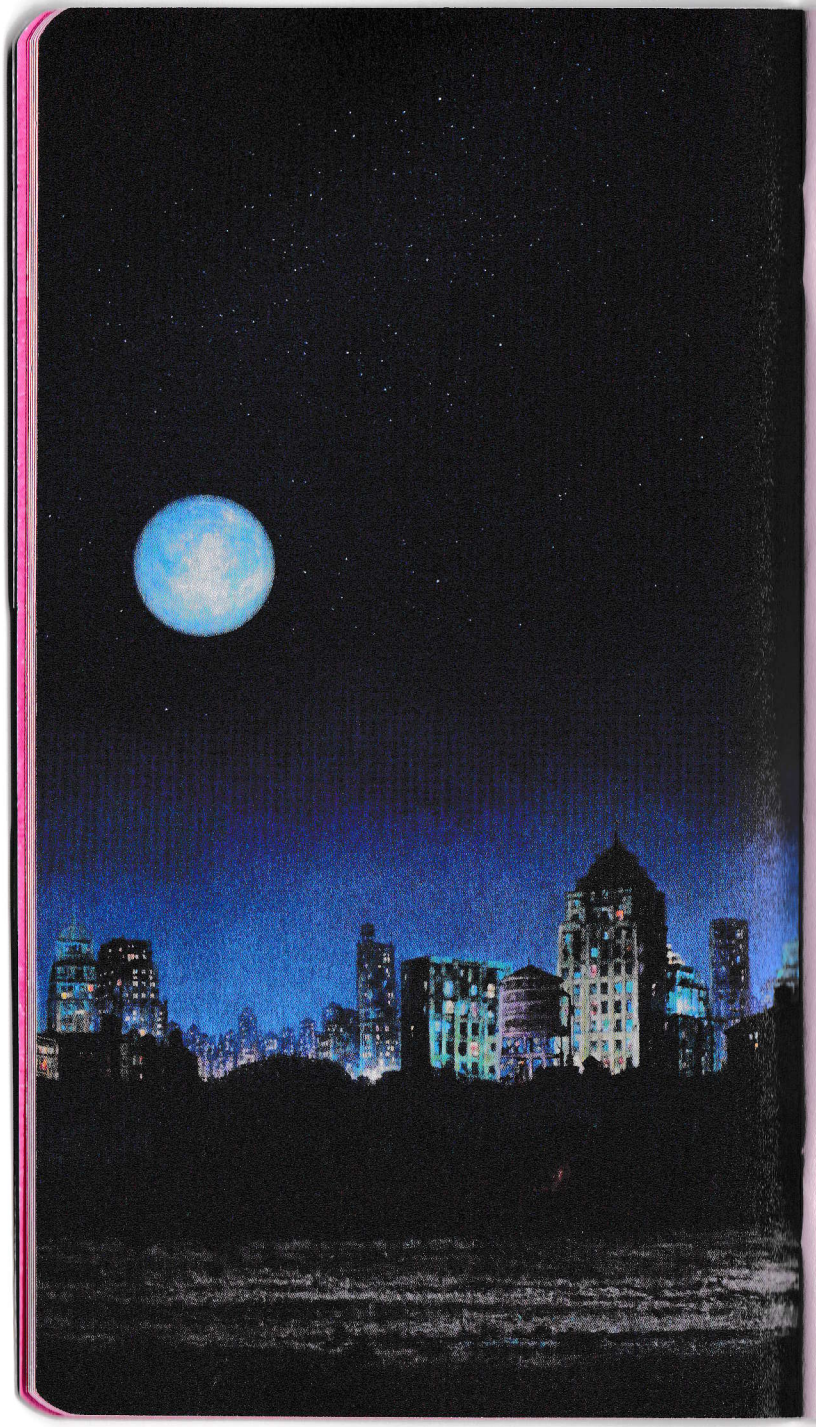


IN DREAMS

BRANDON
TONNER-CONNOLLY
AND MATT HYLAND

We didn't know if it would work . . .

After two months of research and design, we were on set at a remote Vancouver Island summer camp that we had repurposed for the movie. The 35mm camera was mounted in the exact position we'd marked off weeks before. It pointed toward a building we'd converted into Billy's private cinema, nestled in a lush forest. The glass plate, gripped snugly by two C stands, hovered exactly fifty-two inches off the ground (we knew because we checked it sixteen times). A few moments earlier, Erkin Aycan, our matte painter, had carried the sheet of glass in, not wanting to entrust it to unaccustomed hands after the hours he'd spent locked in a hotel room (his improvised studio) crafting the snowy mountain peaks and receding evergreens. If we were off by a quarter inch with the alignment we'd calculated in the abstract, or if the natural light didn't match what had been painted, or if any of a thousand other small variables didn't line up, the illusion would fall flat.

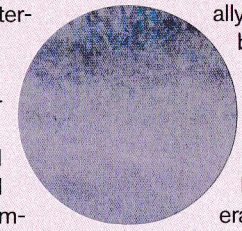
Well before we had any idea of how, or if, we could pull it off, Jane imagined the matte paintings as a core part of the film's design. The idea was to make five key moments of the story knowingly cinematic, speaking to both the visual landscape of the forest around the camp and the emotional landscape of the characters. We wanted the matte paintings to help transport the audience out of reality (an extremely slippery concept in the film to begin with) and into the inner world of the characters. The first painting appears outside a hotel window, a distant suggestion of another world. The second, at a summer camp building turned into a cinema, is a portal beckoning Kris into a storybook.

Film is already a magic trick, converting the three-dimensional world into a two-dimensional image, using depth, color, and light to make you believe it's still three-dimensional. A glass matte takes that a step further, with a two-dimensional painting mounted somewhere between the camera and the scenery, invisibly merging both into an entirely new image. It's then captured in real time, with actors moving seamlessly through a shot that's part reality, part illusion. The results have created some of the most iconic visuals in cinema,

from the sinister views of Bodega Bay with infinite crows perched on telephone wires in *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963) to the NYC skyline in John Carpenter's 1981 film *Escape From New York* (which, fun fact, was painted by then SFX artist James Cameron). For the trick to work, the camera, glass matte composition, and real-world scenery all need to be chosen ahead of time, then lined up very precisely together again during production. It's risky to film live, to say the least. Before they were abandoned after the advent of CGI, matte paintings were typically done in a studio with footage that had already been captured, and/or with a separate glass matte unit, allowing the production to control as many of the variables as possible.

We had neither, but compensated with a love for Jane's vision that compelled us to figure it out.

The first step was working out how to plan the effect without a 35mm camera or Eric K. Yue, our Director of Photography, since he was already shooting the rest of the movie elsewhere on the island. The summer camp was hours away from the rest of the locations, so we stole away whenever we could to stake out a camera position using a digital stand-in, noting the exact height, distance from the cinema building, angle, and other measurements. We marked it off several ways, at one point literally using string tied between the building, our tripod, and the surrounding trees, to triangulate (and later recreate) our specific position just in case all else failed. We knew it would be weeks until the 35mm camera got to that spot and we would learn if it all worked in one decisive moment.



We then took a sheet of glass, mounted it in front of the cinema, and very carefully taped off the sections we didn't want our scenic to paint (i.e. the building and the

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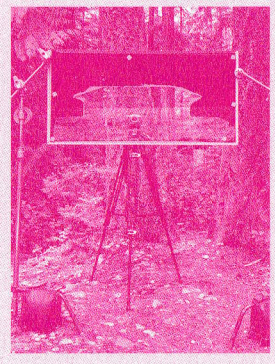
rest of the foreground). Once we had that, we locked Erkin in his art studio/hotel room with the concept art, his paint supplies, and a room service menu. The mission fell to Erkin not because he had done this before, but because he was our bravest scenic, and the one with the most fine art experience. We'd tried to find a painter in British Columbia with glass matte experience, but the last person who had created one for a Disney movie decades ago had recently passed away. "Any chance he left some notes behind?" we nearly asked his family in desperation.

One of the many beguiling things Jane said at the beginning of shooting *I Saw The TV Glow* was that the film wouldn't look like nineties TV shows but would look and feel like the memory of watching them. Seeing the monitor flicker to life and the image line up perfectly at Camp Miasma, the idea came to mind again. The frame, composed of different planes existing together seamlessly only on the screen in front of us and on the film being exposed in the camera, felt like the articulation of pure emotion, "externalizing the ferment of inner life," in the words of Siegfried Kracauer.

Hannah observed the dreamlike image, the romance of the moment in the story present in the fragile reality on display at the monitor, and stepped into the foreground, completing the illusion.



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